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Substantive questions

Activities of the Joint United Nations Information Committee in 1999

Report of the Secretary-General

1. In its 46/73 B of 11 December 1991, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit the reports of the Joint United Nations Information Committee (JUNIC) to the Committee on Information at its consecutive sessions. The present report, covering the activities of JUNIC during 1999, has been prepared in response to that request.

2. JUNIC held its twenty-fifth session at the headquarters of the International Atomic Energy Agency at the Vienna International Centre on 8 July 1999 under the chairmanship of Vaiju Naravane, Director of Public Relations of the World Health Organization. Directors of Information and officials of 24 United Nations bodies, including specialized agencies and related organizations, attended the session. The report on the session was submitted to the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC). JUNIC considered a variety of topics relating to inter-agency cooperation in public information and communications matters. A brief summary of the discussion and an account of some of the follow-up action on decisions taken at the session on issues that could be of interest to the members of the Committee on Information is set out below.

3. JUNIC continued its broad-based discussion of the ways and means of promoting better public understanding of the role and achievements of the United Nations. The Director of Communications and Special Projects in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General briefed JUNIC on the progress achieved in strengthening the role of communications in the work of the United Nations at the highest level and, in that context, the implementation of the recommendations of the Secretary-General's Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities. Members of JUNIC were informed of the measures taken to promote a communications culture at all levels of the Secretariat, including the issuance of the media guidelines for United Nations officials. Members of JUNIC expressed strong support for the work of the Communications Group at Headquarters and stressed the importance of two-way traffic between the Group and the executive heads of the organizations of the United Nations system, describing the link as the essence of communication. JUNIC also suggested the creation of similar communications groups at other headquarters locations. In view of the complexity and importance of the communications issues in building support among a wide range of audiences and constituencies of the United Nations system, JUNIC reiterated its recommendation that a broad-based discussion of the issue of strengthening the information and communications capacity of the United Nations system be placed on the agenda of one of the forthcoming

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meetings of ACC. JUNIC felt that a system-wide discussion of this important issue among the executive heads of organizations of the United Nations system, under the leadership of the Secretary-General, would contribute to the strengthening of a joint vision of common objectives, leading to a stronger sense of a unified purpose.

4. JUNIC considered several aspects of the work of the Non-Governmental Liaison Service whose programme complements the role played by relevant units within the organizations of the United Nations system in providing public information and liaison services to non-governmental organizations. In view of the continuing precarious financial situation of the programme, JUNIC urged the programmes, funds and specialized agencies of the United Nations system to strengthen their support to the Service.

5. JUNIC continued to review the issues relating to the joint participation of the United Nations system in the Hannover Exposition 2000, to be held from 1 June to 31 October 2000 under the theme "Humankind, nature, technology". Just prior to the opening of the session of the Committee, the host Government had identified four corporate sponsors which had pledged 4.5 million deutsche mark to cover the cost of the participation of the United Nations system in the Exposition. Following the session, the Department of Public Information, as the lead agency for the participation in the Exposition, designated the technical director of the United Nations pavilion at the Exposition, for appointment by the Exposition authority. The Department also completed negotiations with the Exposition authority and with the Government of Germany and signed a memorandum of understanding covering various aspects of United Nations participation. ACC endorsed the Secretary-General's nomination of Nadine B. Hack, President of NBH Executive Consulting and former New York City Commissioner for the United Nations and Consular Corps, as Commissioner-General of the United Nations pavilion at the Exposition and appointed her to that position. The pavilion, 850 metres square, will be located in the main plaza of the Exposition site. The proposed presentation will be dynamic and interactive, utilizing state-of-the-art information technology to document the work of the organizations of the United Nations system and highlight the Secretary-General's millennium theme: "The United Nations works for you". Since between 40 million and 50 million visitors are expected during the five months of operation of the Exposition, considered to be the largest such event ever held, the participation of the organizations of the United Nations system is a unique public information opportunity in the millennium year for the Organization to showcase the continued relevance of its objectives and activities to the peoples of the world.

6. JUNIC agreed on a revision of the ACC guidelines on United Nations participation in international expositions, to be used for future joint participation of the organizations of the system in similar events. At its session in October 1999, the Organizing Committee of ACC endorsed the revised guidelines on behalf of ACC.

7. JUNIC considered the information programmes and activities leading to upcoming international conferences, special sessions of the General Assembly and other events. Among them are the special sessions of the General Assembly for five-year reviews of the outcomes of the 1994 Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, and the 1995 World Summit for Social Development; the tenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development; the tenth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders; the Millennium Summit and Assembly; and the observance of the International Year for the Culture of Peace.

8. JUNIC discussed the work of its Technical Advisory Group on the use of computer technology in the field of public information which was revitalized in 1999 under the chairmanship of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Members of the Group undertook to monitor and report on an ongoing basis on technological developments in specific areas, including Web content creation and management, Web technology, print publishing, photography and broadcast media, and to organize workshops for the members of JUNIC on relevant issues and developments, to be held in conjunction with the annual sessions of the Committee.

9. JUNIC recommended, and ACC later endorsed, the appointment of Tore Brevik, Director of Communications and Public Information of UNEP, as the Chairman of JUNIC for 2000 and 2001.

10. The twenty-sixth session of JUNIC is scheduled to take place at the headquarters of the World

Meteorological Organization in Geneva from 11 to 13 July 2000, as part of the observance of that organization's fiftieth anniversary. In the course of the session, the Committee is expected to take up a range of issues of mutual concern, aimed at further strengthening inter-agency cooperation in the field of public information. With participation of experts from member organizations and the television industry, JUNIC is expected to hold a broad-based discussion of the role of television in communicating United Nations messages to audiences around the world, taking into account the rapidly changing technology and evolving market for video products. At the request of ACC, JUNIC will also hold an initial discussion on the feasibility of joint media guidelines for the officials of the organizations of the United Nations system.